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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000228

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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [IV](#)

SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: POLITICAL LEADERS HOLD SUMMIT
MEETING

Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Cote d'Ivoire's five principal political leaders met in Yamoussoukro February 28, the first such meeting since the current crisis began in 2002. They reaffirmed their commitment to the Pretoria Agreement and to holding elections as scheduled, and agreed on six sets of issues: implementing UNSCR 1633 and the constitution harmoniously; moving forward expeditiously with disarmament, and restructuring the armed forces; expeditiously and simultaneously issuing identification cards and registering voters; ensuring equitable access and a message of reconciliation on national radio and television; adopting a "code of good conduct" in political discourse; and resolving the longstanding dispute over the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI). The most important thing about the meeting is that it took place at all. Talking face-to-face could significantly speed up the peace process, but much will depend on implementation. Perhaps the most significant specific achievement is breaking the CEI deadlock. The meeting is also a real tribute to Prime Minister Banny, who is playing an increasingly forceful, positive role in leading this country out of its longstanding crisis. It is noteworthy that he is succeeding by drawing President Gbagbo and other key players in, rather than confronting them. We hope he will be well-received when he comes to Washington later this month to take on another of this country's seemingly intractable problems, its economic crisis, in meetings with the World Bank and the IMF. End Summary.

¶2. (U) President Laurent Gbagbo, Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny, former President Henri Konan Bedie, former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara, and New Forces (FN) Secretary General Guillaume Soro met for four hours in Yamoussoukro on February 28.

¶3. (U) At the end of the meeting, they issued a joint communique reaffirming their commitment to the Pretoria Agreement and to holding elections as scheduled, and listing six points of agreement:

-- They reaffirmed that UNSCR 1633 and the Ivoirian Constitution are not in conflict with each other. The group asked the President and Prime Minister to expeditiously find equitable solutions to any problems that might arise in implementing these documents harmoniously.

-- They agreed on the need to go forward with disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), and to restart the dialogue between the military commanders of the FN and the Armed Forces of Cote d'Ivoire (FANCI) on restructuring of the armed forces. They noted the need for successful reintegration of former combatants into society. They agreed that a sub-regional approach to security is needed, that

would include the Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS) and the West African Monetary Union.

-- They welcomed the possibility of simultaneously identifying the population and registering voters.

-- They reviewed measures the government has taken to ensure equitable access to Ivoirian Radio and Television (RTI), and to increase nationwide coverage broadcasting messages of peace. They called on the press to join in the peace process and to refrain from calling it into question.

-- They agreed on a "code of good conduct:" to meet again frequently to advance the peace process and ensure that politics are conducted in an amicable and democratic fashion.

-- Taking note of the arbitration by UN High Representative for Elections on the issue of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), they agreed on the creation of a fourth vice president position (with the expectation that it would go to President Gbagbo's Ivoirian Popular Front (FPI) party). They also called on the Prime Minister to convene a meeting within the next few days of the CEI Executive Board, the Linas-Marcoussis signatories, and all other interested parties, to determine the powers of the Executive Board and the operating rules of the CEI, so as to provide for free, fair and transparent elections.

14. (U) In comments to the press after the meeting, Bedie called it the first decisive action that has been taken since the beginning of the crisis, but he cautioned that progress will not be easy, there will be highs and lows. Soro said it was a symbolic meeting but a step in the right direction. Now it is necessary to move forward to achieve the goals that

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have been agreed on. Banny said it was a good meeting that will give hope to Ivoirians. The issues discussed were important for the peace process. Ouattara said it was a good, friendly meeting that put in place measures that will advance the peace process. All agreed that the atmosphere prevailing during the meeting was very positive.

15. (C) FN spokesman Sidiki Konate told the Ambassador March 1 that it was FANCI Chief of Staff General Mangou who broke the logjam on security arrangements to allow the meeting to go forward. FANCI and the FN each ended up with five armed guards. UN peacekeeping forces were also present. No armed guards were allowed in the meeting room. Participation was one-plus-one. Konate said the FN were very pleased with the results. All the key topics were discussed: the CEI, restructuring of the military, DDR, identification. He said Soro will be coming to Abidjan at the end of this week.

16. (C) Djedje Mady, Secretary General of Bedie's Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire (PDCI) party, told the Ambassador that the PDCI is also pleased with the results of the meeting, but that everything will depend on the implementation of what was agreed on. Mady said Bedie will also be coming to Abidjan this week. (He has been living in his home village in central Cote d'Ivoire.) Ali Coulibaly, spokesman for Ouattara's Rally for Republicans (RDR) party, told us the meeting was a good first step toward creating a climate of confidence, and the RDR is hopeful that all will follow through with what they promised. He said it was particularly significant that this was the first time since 2002 that the Ivoirian parties were able to sit down together without outside interference.

17. (C) Comment. The most important thing about this meeting is that it took place at all. The very fact that the leaders met together indicates a certain level of confidence, which in and of itself is significant and a litmus test of where the political process currently is. The fact that they are talking to each other directly rather than through intermediaries both speeds up the process and allows for

better communication, another plus. Perhaps the most significant specific achievement is breaking the deadlock over the CEI, assuming it actually works. This paves the way for preparations for elections to get underway. However, much depends on implementation, which in the past has often fallen short of rhetoric.

18. (C) This meeting is also a real tribute to Prime Minister Banny, who took the lead in organizing it and in setting the agenda. Banny is playing an increasingly forceful, positive role in advancing the peace process and leading the country out of its longstanding crisis. He is doing this by drawing President Gbagbo and other key players into the process, rather than by confronting them. We note that Banny is reportedly planning a trip to Washington this month for meetings with the World Bank and the IMF about Cote d'Ivoire's economic crisis, taking upon himself yet another of this country's most difficult and seemingly intractable problems. We hope he will be well-received. End Comment.
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